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Oversold and overlooked : the public image of John Burroughs

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"Oversold and
Overlooked: The
Public Image of
John Burroughs"

January 12, 1997

"Oversold and Overlooked:
The Public Image of John Burroughs"

by
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ABSTRACT

Popular culture assumes many forms of expression. This study attempts to locate, define, and assess at least one of these forms from the turn of the century: the public image of the American Naturalist John Burroughs. Using sources that are the traditional voice of popular culture--journal articles, newspapers, school texts, and biographies--I have reconstructed the public perception of Burroughs and unearthed a correlation between that perception and a popular turn-of-the-century social phenomenon: the back-to-nature movement.

During the early stages of my research, it slowly occurred to me that the public image of Burroughs and the back-to-nature movement were not separate entities. They were, in fact, one. This study demonstrates how Burroughs's image reflected social, technological, and economic changes occurring in the culture at large. Treating the back-to-nature movement as the source of the public image had its advantages. It allowed me to see that what, to late-twentieth century eyes, might be ambiguities can more accurately be seen as a process of assimilation. Because the public image of Burroughs is and was a product of turn-of-the-century culture, the ambiguities found in the image need to be assessed as cultural shifts and not as simple historical oddities.

Most importantly, this study offers a hypothesis to explain the peculiar disappearance of Burroughs from the American literary scene. Because Burroughs was so closely associated with the back-to-nature movement, the more philosophic nature of his writings has, until quite recently, gone without critical examination. And because philosophical concerns, then and now, lay outside mainstream culture, Burroughs as philosopher had no popular forum after the passing of the social movement which drove his public image. Hopefully, this essay will contribute to the understanding of Burroughs, and, to the contextualization of man's complex relationship to nature.

This study is not about a person per se. It is, however, the study of how the public perception of an immensely popular nature writer of the turn of the twentieth century was utilized to celebrate and justify a changing social order, and how the perception, or image, faded and reappeared. John Burroughs, naturalist writer from West Park on-the-Hudson, New York, enjoyed an impressively long and productive writing career. At the time of his death in 1921, Burroughs had over one and one half million books in print and nearly thirty titles listed to his authorship. He enjoyed friendships with poets, presidents, and industrialists, which brought him a great deal of attention in the press, and he had the love and respect of millions of school children who read his essays as part of their educational curriculum. In spite of all this, Burroughs quite suddenly faded from the public mind and from the literary scene. Answers as to how and why he vanished and a possible hypothesis for his most recent resurgence can be found by examining his public image. John Burroughs's literary reputation was the victim of its own popularity. So closely identified was he with a fashionable social movement and the popularization of that movement that when the fad wore off so did Burroughs. But that is just part of the story.

John Burroughs's association with the back-to-nature

movement and the rush to live the "simple life" was such that, when the country's agenda regarding nature shifted to an environmental consciousness, few people could, or wanted to, see through the myth of the "Sage of Slabsides."

Burroughs was oversold to his reading public in the dozens of articles that appeared about him both during and after his life. Sensationalities, lionizing biographies, over-enthusiastic treatments of how and why he lived a simple and rustic existence on the banks of the breathtakingly beautiful Hudson River simply overshadowed appreciation of his impressive intellectual prowess. For example, many of Burroughs's more metaphysical essays were rejected by magazine editors suggesting that the various journals using Burroughs's essays wanted to appeal more to the general reading population than those interested in hard-core Transcendentalist nature philosophy. Therefore, it can safely be assumed that when Burroughs died, few people appreciated, or even knew of, his more sophisticated nature philosophy which would certainly have had more literary longevity than essays written for a fleeting cultural fad.

Burroughs lived and died during a time when the celebration of nature actually distorted his true contributions to American thought. While Henry Thoreau is referred to as "the common man's philosopher," it is Burroughs who actually fits the role better in his approach to nature. Burroughs's naturalism promoted an idea of

appreciating nature for nature's sake. For the most part, Burroughs's works were free of controversial environmental issues and the implication of man's encroachment on the natural landscape. This is perhaps central to the understanding of Burroughs's approach to nature. As a product of the turn of the century, Burroughs saw man as part of the overall scheme of nature and attempted to articulate his findings in just that way. Nature for Burroughs was not found in a museum, a science book, or a bird-watching directory. It was found in casual observation and in man's everyday intercourse with his natural outdoor surroundings. However, this makes it difficult to draw comparisons between Burroughs and his contemporaries. In a very real sense he stands alone in the genre of the nature essay. He shares Thoreau's transcendentalist approach of locating man's place in nature, but lacks the author of Walden's biting criticism of man's cruelties to nature and his cosmic preoccupations. More closely related to Burroughs in style is John Muir. However, Muir injected a great deal of raw scientific theory into his nature accounts, which, for Burroughs, served only to strangle nature's essences. Burroughs cared little for the depiction of romantic scenery, the search for the sublime, or the moralizing of nature that characterized much nature writing of the time. Like Thoreau, he was interested in the bird behind the bird, but he did not let the cosmic or metaphysical questions

interfere with the real and plainly visible.

Wherever we place Burroughs in the litany of American Naturalist writers, it must not be forgotten that he produced his writings during a time when the American perception of nature was assimilating other aspects of culture. For example, the automobile was making nature accessible to thousands of Americans. And while the turn-of-the-century American embraced the opportunity to experience nature from behind the wheel of a Ford, the historian needs to investigate why this seeming cultural clash played out the way it did. Why, we must ask, was the automobile, this symbol of American industrialization and progress, not seen as an intrusion to the wilderness and things "natural?" One answer might lie in the fact that the American perception of nature has always been open to whatever cultural influences existed at the time. The automobile was simply a part of America's relationship to nature. It was not the same potentially destructive instrument that it would become in the 1960s. This is perhaps one of the key elements that helps to contextualize the understanding of Burroughs's public image. He wrote for an audience that was experiencing a major shift in its attitude toward nature, a shift that was making room for new experiences in transportation, education, retail marketing, and most importantly, where nature fit into American life at the turn of the century. Before investigating the dynamics of Americans relationship

to nature as seen through the public image of John Burroughs, it is necessary to briefly trace the history of the perception of nature in America.

In America, the attitude toward nature went through what might be called a series of renaissances. From the earliest British contact with North America, accounts of man's experiences with the wild were recorded and published. The purposes of these early narratives ranged from simple journal reflections to published tracts intended to attract prospective colonists to the New World.¹ By the time America was colonized, the perception of nature had shifted from being the threatening unknown that Columbus and others had encountered to the land of opportunity that could be tamed with hard work and initiative.² Once the initial fear of nature had been removed from the American consciousness, nature study, or natural history, began to take shape in various forms. John James Audubon's monumental Birds of America (3 vols. 1827-1838) and Alexander Wilson's American Ornithology or The Natural History of Birds of the United States (9 vols. 1808-1814) exposed thousands of Americans to the study of ornithology, while Thomas Jefferson's Notes on the State of Virginia (1785) and William Bartram's Travels (1791) had earlier described the physical landscape and introduced the idea of aesthetic appreciation to the study of nature.³

Perhaps nowhere was the aesthetic appreciation of

nature influenced more than by the Transcendentalist philosophers of the early-to-mid nineteenth century. At the risk of over-simplification, the writings of Emerson called for a simplification of American life, and Thoreau's Walden articulated that call into practice. For Emerson the value of earning one's bread outdoors was diminishing, and one way to win back the nobility of the American farmer, and all he stood for, was to re-examine individual values. For the Transcendentalists, the woods offered not only a retreat from the distractions of modern living, but also the best place for man to look inside his soul.⁴

While the influence of the above mentioned writers on the naturalists of Burroughs's period can hardly be overemphasized, the major difference between the two is the professionalization of the naturalist/writer. Naturalism, or the act of observing and recording those observations, was, in Jefferson's day, a reflection of stately gentility, a hobby reserved for those with available leisure time and wealth. The professionalization of the naturalist, i.e. writing for a targeted audience, changed the substantive structure of the essay entirely, meaning, where Audubon and Bartram could write without the watchful eye of an editor, Burroughs's ideas would be culled by editors for, if not cultural relevance, at least for trends that best fit the current public perception of nature. This is not to downplay Burroughs's originality or suggest that Burroughs sought to

merely "cash in" on the marketability of the nature essays he produced. I make this suggestion to magnify the importance of the public image as a product of popular perception, and to emphasize how the public image of Burroughs can be used as a window through which we can accurately view the turn of the century's perception and use of nature and its appreciation.

Reconstructing a public image from the past can be a difficult task. However, with Burroughs the job is made easier due both to the popularity of the back-to-nature movement and to the uniformity of much of the material published about him during and after his life. Using articles that appeared in the popular press is the most effective way of identifying the public image. The articles are the "primary source" because they created the image. Using more traditional sources such as letters, journals, and diaries reveals only a part of the public image and speaks more to the uses of the image than to the construction of the image itself. The voice of popular opinion and sentiment was the popular press. It was necessary for the publishers of magazines and journals to identify what was important to their organ's readership because speaking to those issues in the form of articles and essays meant surviving in an incredibly competitive market. This is what makes the identification of the Burroughs image less complicated than it might otherwise be. The image was

tied directly to the back-to-nature movement, and by getting to the source of the movement itself, we can see how and why Burroughs's public image took the form it did.

The public image of John Burroughs is uncomplicated. His books and essays brought people into the woods. To turn-of-the-century readers who perused his twenty-four volumes and the numerous articles written about him during his life and to the more contemporary readers up to the 1950s, he was the saintly guardian of nature. He was a Thoreauian-type of recluse who lived in wooded seclusion to better contemplate, study, and reflect on nature and the human species' place in it. In Burroughs the public saw a soft-spoken and gentle grandfatherly figure whose flowing white beard added a degree of authenticity to his paternalistic aura. Written in down-to-earth style, Burroughs's books were themselves a walk in the woods or a country weekend vacation that served as a temporary release from the pressures of everyday labor. To urban-industrial America, John Burroughs represented the simple life.

Burroughs's image reflected how turn-of-the-century Americans were coping with industrialization and the rapid influx of new technologies on top of a commercially oriented society. At the very core of Burroughs's image was the popular back-to-nature movement. Through the Burroughs public image we can see that the back-to-nature movement was a quest by turn-of-the-century Americans to re-evaluate

their place in society, an attempt to define a new philosophy in a world that was becoming increasingly industrialized and capitalistic. The construction of John Burroughs's public image shows how America slowly assimilated the demands of the new cultural order.

America was ripe for the appearance of a nature guru at the turn of the century. Values were changing. As cities became increasingly unlivable, upper and middle class Americans began to move beyond the city limits to the quieter, more humane outskirts. With this move from the city also came a shift in the appreciation of nature. In Speaking For Nature, Paul Brooks suggests that with urbanization also came an expectation of what country life and living with and among nature should entail. Weaned on the Transcendentalist philosophy of Emerson and Thoreau, early nature aficionados expected to find virtue and simplicity in nature.⁵ However, not everyone in America who called themselves "nature lovers" at the turn of the century fully bought in to the Transcendentalist philosophy that encouraged a deeper appreciation of the individual's relationship to nature. While Transcendentalism has come to mean many things for many aspects of culture, for the naturalist it meant seeing supernatural forces at work without the oversight of an omnipotent deity. In a sense, it called for the exercise of one's own creativity and for individuals to see and utilize the spiritual aspects of

nature in their own lives. In fact, most Americans, as Peter Schmitt points out, only "seasoned" their lives with nature.⁶ It was to these Americans that guidance regarding the appreciation of the outdoors in the form of the nature essay appealed most.

The moralizing of nature is the best place to begin to reconstruct what America expected from nature and the outdoors and to define what it was about John Burroughs that made his life so attractive. To some, life in the city at the turn of the century represented a stagnation of the mind and spirit, as well as presenting physical dangers, a theme readily advanced by popular journals. "The continuous racket of city life," as reported in one popular magazine, "pulls down the physical structure, disturbs and disorders the mental faculties, and has no slight bearing upon the morale of the human being."⁷ Still more journals began to show evidence that America was looking beyond the workplace and the "American dream" for personal fulfillment and satisfaction. For example, The Saturday Evening Post reported that America was showing signs of looking toward nature for more intellectual stimulation. Americans were cultivating this stimulation by "providing for the wants of the mind and the soul." As evidence for this newfound "liberation" the Post pointed toward "the universal tendency of the American to get out of doors and keep out of doors."⁸

While many periodicals lamented city life, others responded to the back-to-nature call reflecting less social and more intellectual spiritual concerns. The Outlook saw nature as the meeting place of God and man: "it is the playground of the soul," and "full of analogies with the life of man; its very breath invigorates the body, its beauty feeds the imagination."⁹ Simply put, increasing numbers of Americans at the turn of the century felt constricted physically, spiritually, and emotionally. The back-to-nature movement, supplemented by the transportation revolution, offered the individual not only the opportunity to "experience" nature but to personally investigate it for oneself. Along with the picnic basket, Americans brought a mixed bag of expectations regarding nature and needed someone to help sort out and justify the many changes that were taking place.

Almost simultaneously with the introduction of the aesthetic appreciation of nature in popular accounts came the idea of extracting a living creed from nature. Nature ceased to be merely something to be read about and became something to be "experienced." While it is true that Americans had been experiencing nature since the formation of the colonies, this period is unique for the literature that was available to help in that experience. This particular renaissance in America's attitude toward nature cannot be pinpointed as having one single motivational

factor. The desire to experience nature came from a combination of social and cultural changes. Advances in transportation technology such as the construction of turnpikes and the successful development of steamboat transportation in 1807 made the outdoors more accessible to greater numbers of Americans. In 1825 the Erie Canal was opened, which was followed roughly in the 1830s by a rapidly expanding railroad network. Coinciding with the revolution in transportation in the early nineteenth century was a deeper appreciation of the aesthetic in nature as interpreted by the romantics. Writers such as James Fenimore Cooper and Washington Irving were popularizing outdoor themes, while the artists of the Hudson River School were romanticizing nature from the 1820s to well after the Civil War.¹⁰

In the twenty-year period following the American Civil War, the magazine industry experienced an incredible boom. Frank Mott estimates that during the twenty years from 1865 to 1885, the number of popular periodicals in the United States increased four and a half times from roughly 700 in 1865 to 3,300 in 1885.¹¹ The competitive nature of the magazine industry forced editors to experiment with various methods by which to attract subscribers. Out of this experimentation came the renewal of an old genre--the magazine essay. The nineteenth-century version of the magazine essay was designed to comment on popular themes and

topics of the day. A review of the titles of various columns indicates how the magazine essay became a "catch-all" for what was on the public's mind: the Atlantic had its "Contributors Club"; Harper's offered the "Easy Chair" column; Scribner's had "Topics of the Times"; while The Galaxy offered "Casual Cogitations;" and Lippincott's "The Monthly Gossip."¹² While there was a great deal of seemingly trivial material in popular journals of the mid-to-late nineteenth century, the moralizing in the essays was central to the American attitude toward nature and more specifically to the public image of John Burroughs.

In John Burroughs the popular press found the epitome of what the back-to-nature movement represented: a catch-all for the cultural changes taking place as reflected in the movement. He was the perfect individual to be adopted as America's keeper of nature because, as a product of the turn-of-the-century, he shared the same values as his readers. His life embodied not only what was pure in life outdoors, but it offered substantiation and justification of the positive effects of living close to the land as well. The popular press used John Burroughs precisely to sell this idea.

Did America jump blindly into a sixty year "literary love affair" with Burroughs merely on the basis of his simple lifestyle, or was there a deeper reason why he was so widely acclaimed? Certainly, Burroughs was not the only

author producing books on nature topics during the back-to-nature phenomenon, so what was it about Burroughs, beyond his simple lifestyle, that appealed to the country and made him stand out as the nature guru? Part of the answer to these questions rests in the reactions to his literary style. His writings suggested to his readers that he could be trusted to reveal truths in and about nature, not in an overly scientific sense, but in a manner that appealed to the pedestrian or casual observer of nature.

Burroughs's approach to nature writing played directly into the hands of his public image. He came across as one of the people ever conscious of appearing too "high-brow;" he strove to provide a more down-to-earth approach to the appreciation of nature. Although he admired the Transcendentalists, he thought Thoreau and Emerson too concerned with ethics. And while he celebrated Gilbert White's classical eighteenth-century work Selborne for its contribution to the appreciation of nature and its pastoral overtones, Burroughs would call it too scientific for his particular taste. By his own admission, Burroughs cared "little for the merely scientific aspects [of nature]. . . . and nothing for the ethical." His approach to nature writing was simply to record his observations in an uncomplicated style of prose that brought nature directly to his readers as he saw it.

My own aim, so far as I have any, is entirely artistic.
. . . I will not preach one word. I will have a pure

result, or nothing. I paint the bird, or the trout, or the scene, for its own sake, truthfully anyhow, and picturesquely if I can.¹³

This is certainly one of the keys to the success of Burroughs as a nature writer: his desire to write of the simple aspects of nature. He wrote volumes that recorded wildlife simply as it was. He flavored his essays with Transcendentalist thought but did not become bogged down in the search for the philosopher's stone. Likewise, while scientific fact would, at times, excite him into lengthy quotations and paraphrase, he rarely allowed the empirical side of science to overpower his writing. For thousands of Americans who were bringing curiosity and a layman's interest into nature, Burroughs offered the perfect literary recipe for the turn of the century: a pinch of science, a dash of Transcendentalism, and large dollops of nature for nature's sake.

This mixture is precisely what much of Burroughs's readership was clamoring for: a literary supplement to narrate one's own jaunts into the woods, or a description of what that experience was like for those who could not or would not experience the outdoors first hand. The perfect blending of Burroughs's literary style to the neo-scientific/philosophical curiosities of the public during the back-to-nature movement is best captured by one Elliot Coues, who wrote Burroughs in 1874 to commend him for his book Wake Robin.

My normal state has been for some years that of a "wader" through books about birds, still I have come to regard ornithological literature as just so much shop work. . . . Your book has been to me a green spot in the wilderness, where I have lingered with rare pleasure, enjoying the birds as nowhere else straightaway. . . I . . . can bear witness to the minute fidelity and vividness of your portraiture. How many things you saw--how many more you felt. . . . you bring it all back to me things which I felt at the time, but which passed like last night's dream, I find here crystallized clear.¹⁴

Early reviews of Burroughs's works surrounded his image with the idea that here was an author to be trusted--a man who reported genuine observations and delivered them in a way that the casual observer could not only understand but relate to as well. In reviewing Burroughs's first collection of nature essays, Wake Robin (1871), the Atlantic Monthly called to the reader's attention a number of characteristics.

It is written with a grace which continually subordinates itself to the material, but which we hope will not escape the recognition of the reader whose pleasure it enhances. . . . Mr. Burroughs adds a strain of genuine poetry, which makes his papers unusually delightful, while he has more humor than generally falls to the ornithological tribe. . . it is in every way an uncommon book that he has given us; fresh, wholesome, sweet, and full of gentle and thoughtful spirit.¹⁵

By the time Burroughs's fifth book, Locusts and Wild Honey (1879), was published, the nuances of his literary style had become more clearly defined. By then, America knew what to expect from Burroughs and realized that what was to be found in his nature books satisfied not only the curiosity about nature, but presented nature in a way that

the public wanted it--truthfully and simply from a man who actually lived the nature experience. Reviewing Burroughs's Locusts and Wild Honey, the Atlantic Monthly wedded the naturalist's favorable appeal to the cultural expectations that America brought to the back-to-nature movement.

In its review, Atlantic commented on the down-to-earth manner of Burroughs's approach to nature and its accessibility to general readers. Burroughs was "charming" and "simple in manner. . . . very honest. . . . and of wholesome and happy mood." Locusts and Wild Honey was bound to appeal to those who looked forward to a romp through the countryside.¹⁶ This little piece from the *Atlantic Monthly* stresses the toned down nature of Burroughs's writing style and utilizes that fact as a marketing ploy to attract potential buyers for the book. It was important that the general reading public be assured that when they purchased one of Burroughs's publications they were purchasing a book that would not lose them in naturalistic philosophizing. Burroughs's simplistic lifestyle, while appealing to the expectations of thousands of Americans getting back to nature, helped to facilitate the message that was coming through his works. The individuals attracted to the back-to-nature movement did not pick John Burroughs at random from a pool of authors who simply told readers what they wanted to hear about nature. Burroughs's books offered a perfect resume, complete with character reference, to a

public in search of a spokesperson of nature.

From numerous articles about Burroughs appearing in popular print during his lifetime we can detect the fundamental lesson of the back-to-nature movement--life outdoors was not only good, it was virtuous. On top of this fundamental principle there can be seen a strain of moralizing that attempted to justify some major cultural changes. For the most part, the articles about Burroughs read almost identically. They offered biographical information on him and lionized his plain, simple, yet contemplatively productive life. Yet these articles also transform Burroughs into a figure that supports a specific reflection of the "cultural baggage" nature lovers were bringing with them as they went back to nature. For example, in 1902 there appeared in the Dial an anonymously written article that suggests this image manipulation. The Dial called Burroughs "simple and forceful." More revealingly, Burroughs's style was connected to a derogatory connotation regarding "high-brow" living and the urban life. He "disdains mere polish and urbanity" while promoting "the quiet, peace, and mildness of the countryside."¹⁷ Still other articles about Burroughs clearly defined the basic principle of getting back to nature. The Outlook portrayed Burroughs as a major catalyst for Americans getting back to nature. His essays had powerful transformative qualities that "made the front yard part of the landscape, and the

back yard an avenue of escape into a world in which there is neither politics nor business."¹⁸

The above quotes tell us as much about the back-to-nature movement as John Burroughs. In a sense we can detect a somewhat rebellious tone in them. For example, Burroughs's writing does not simply offer a clear and readable collection of nature essays; it rejects all other literary styles that even mention the city. Likewise, reading Burroughs to provide "escape" is even more provocative. We get the impression that Americans barricaded themselves in their homes, so much so that they did not see their own homes as part of the physical or cultural landscape. The opening of the front door to nature was a giant release that presented America not only with a retreat of sorts but also with a sense of belonging to a physical world of fresh air, birds, and trees. It is a fair assumption, then, to suggest that urbanization helped to confuse America's sense of belonging to a physical world.

Likewise, the Dial quote is revealing not only for its derogatory connotations regarding urban living but for another, perhaps more deeply rooted, expression of cultural anxiety. It deprecates other literary styles that are more sophisticated, or "polished." It calls attention to the existing static between class structures, suggesting that the middle-class readership of John Burroughs had some kind of cultural need to justify their attraction to the

naturalist's writings. It is perhaps a need born of fear, as the quote suggests that the countryside "envelops" as if to provide an invisible force shield against the noise and bustle of the city.

That America was making cultural adjustments to the increasing physical and emotional demands of the city is evidenced by the fact that not all periodicals stressed the negative aspects of city living. In 1901 the magazine Country Life in America began publication specifically to articulate a balance between the virtues of the country and the practicality of life in the city. It was designed to "point the way to nature" for those who demanded the best of both worlds.

Country Life in America is edited in the country. It is a country magazine for the country man, and for the city man who wants to know the country; it is not a magazine that sees the country afar off and takes it for granted. It is not a vacation journal. We hope that the smell of the soil will be on its pages.¹⁹

This half-way meeting between country and city life was attached to John Burroughs as well. In a contemporary biography remarkable for reading a plethora of social and cultural issues into the life of John Burroughs, Clifton Johnson reported on why Burroughs himself selected the location of his home, "Riverby," some ninety miles up the Hudson River from New York City. Johnson quotes Burroughs as stating, "I wanted to be where both New York City and my own home in the Catskills would be readily accessible."²⁰ Although the connections of Burroughs to the city were made

subtly, they were made. While reporting on the location where Burroughs's nature observations were made, The Outlook closed an article conspicuously mentioning that Burroughs's home in West Park, New York was "not so many miles from the metropolis."²¹

In many ways the Burroughs image was a study in contradiction. He was portrayed as a Thoreauian type recluse, yet his travels abroad, his camping trips with Henry Ford, Harvey Firestone, and Thomas Edison, his participation in the Harriman Expedition to Alaska in 1899, and his jaunts with President Theodore Roosevelt to the West in the Spring of 1903, were celebrated in newspapers and journals alike. He was portrayed as a man of the woods who lived a simple and uncomplicated life away from the noise and fast pace of the city; yet, he used extensively his gift of an automobile from his good friend Henry Ford, Burroughs himself admitting that "I hate every automobile but my own." He owned a victrola. He once told an interviewer "the movies are the pest of our times. They are a part of our hurry and shallowness." Yet, he himself was featured on the big screen in a short film made by the Edison Moving Picture Company titled "A Day With John Burroughs."²² America accepted these seeming contradictions in the image of Burroughs because the mechanisms that were creating the dichotomies--the automobile, the victrola, and a budding movie industry--were new to the country at large and were in the process of

being assimilated into the culture. To see how the country was "feeling out" these new technologies and wedding them to the image of Burroughs, one needs only to turn to the automobile.

The automobile was, paradoxically, the great emancipator of the back-to-nature movement. Harper's Weekly Advertiser stated that "it has shown the city man the country and at the same time given the means of living there."²³ Commonly attacked by various social and political interest groups as being detrimental to health and property, the automobile found advocates in lovers of nature.

"Hopeless city dwellers have migrated to the 'wilds' and become serene and enlightened country 'lifers.'"²⁴ Even those who were not enthusiastic about America's new-found mobility came to terms with the automobile through nature.

E. S. Martin contributed to Harper's:

And so while a horse suits our family at present much better than an automobile. . . . I am going to be tolerant of automobiles, even though they abrade the nerves. . . . I guess they are just a part of the *vis medicatrix nature*; phenomena gradually developed from the disease called city life, and adapted to mitigate its severities, if not to cure it. They certainly do help people to get out of cities, and though they may seem to make it somewhat too easy for them to get back, that is not a real defect. Anything that takes people to the country is good thing.²⁵

As stated earlier, Burroughs accepted gifts of automobiles from Henry Ford, and the automobile quickly became integrated into the Burroughs public image. Many of the later articles written about Burroughs made references

to his extensive use of the automobile and how the machine aided Burroughs in allowing him to get deeper into the woods and see more of the wildlife around him. The most telling aspect of Burroughs's association with the automobile was how it was accepted by others as part of his identity. The public image of Burroughs, it would seem, was chauffeured into the twentieth century in a Ford. Albert Houghton Pratt, visiting Burroughs to record the naturalist on moving film for the first time, published this account:

The hours were rushing by with Slabsides. . . . still to be recorded. But first a scene most incongruous in character was to be enacted. We were to see this child of the soil, this man who delights in primitive nature, crank his Ford car, and. . . . drive off with all the steady assurance of an expert chauffeur, which, indeed, he really is.²⁶

The incongruity of Burroughs's association with the automobile does nothing to alter the public image. Reflecting the country's social and cultural struggle that was realigning the attitude toward nature to accommodate the automobile, the Burroughs public image simply absorbed the new-fangled machine. Although Pratt detects a certain degree of incongruity in the naturalist's use of the automobile, he assumes its positive function in Burroughs's life and goes about his business.

The automobile is only one area in which the Burroughs public image absorbed aspects of the American culture. As mentioned earlier, Burroughs wrote in the age of the professionalized naturalist. And with that

professionalization came the inevitable consequence of the nature essay being thrust into the highly competitive market economy: the backbone of the consumer-oriented society. With the exception of magazines like the Atlantic Monthly and Scribner's, popular magazines and weeklies of the era were highly advertizing-oriented. In fact, in many of these turn-of-the-century publications the advertisements make up as much as three quarters of a given publication's content. Very often, the actual article receives a single column on a page. Reflecting this tendency toward a consumer-oriented society, the Burroughs image was used to sell nature books to a public with a voracious appetite for reading matter on outdoor topics.

There is no doubt that publishers seized on Burroughs's popularity to promote the sale of nature-related books and periodicals. Occasionally, his endorsement would be sought by way of introductions to various nature volumes along with an accompanying photograph to add authenticity.²⁷ Doubleday, Page & Company appealed to the romantic side of Burroughs's public image by taking out a full page advertisement for its Nature Library series. The advertisement featured a photo of Burroughs's white-bearded head looking pastorally over a neat boxed set of nature volumes.²⁸ In an article titled "Visit Pokeepsie's [sic] Suburban Districts And See How The City Is Growing," a local newspaper featured a photo of Burroughs comfortably nestled

in a rocking chair along with an essay by the naturalist titled "John Burroughs Tells How To Enjoy Walking."²⁹

By the early twentieth century, the national produce market had likewise adopted the Burroughs image. Retailing, however, was only the tip of the consumer iceberg, and the Burroughs image was linked to the growing, or more accurately maturing, wholesale industry. In an article written by his son, Julian, Burroughs's philosophy was equated with the struggles of the small farmer against a national marketplace. Julian's article described Burroughs's celery growing enterprise conducted behind his woodland retreat "Slabsides." He commented on the highly competitive nature of the celery market brought on by the railroad: "we enter the lists against California, Michigan, Long Island, Florida . . . New Jersey, Central New York." But the most compelling aspect of Julian's article is his creative use of one of his father's anecdotes: "My father has always maintained that we have but to sit on our doorstep and watch and the world will come to us. It seems almost that way to a celery grower."³⁰

To this point we have investigated how the Burroughs public image was used in association with a few of the basic principles of the back-to-nature movement. While the movement itself ignited an evaluation of many new cultural issues of the day, such as the justification of the use of the automobile, it also featured a renewal of old ones. From

Philadelphia, the Saturday Evening Post ran an article in 1898 laced with the old puritan concept of nature's guiding providence: "Societies decisions are often based on right, and are often of great value, but we should be careful that blind worship of 'good-form' does not shorten our lives and shut our eyes to nature as teacher and revealer." The article concluded in jeremiad fashion that could very well have been authored by Increase Mather: "Nature is merciless to offenders, Nature is kind when we obey her laws, and merciless when we disobey."³¹ The back-to-nature movement also provided its own version of enlightenment thought that "rebelled" against the Burroughs-type "preachers" of nature's gospel. Not interested in a specific "creed" of nature but to simply enjoy nature for nature's sake, Scribner's Magazine bellowed the sentiment of more than a few Americans in 1908.

Have you not also spent whole afternoons moving your eyes expectantly from side to side, seeking each shade of color in cloud or ocean, when those eyes would have done well to rest, perhaps closed? . . . What good is the poets communion with the soul of nature . . . if, instead of feeling it, we keep trying to see if we are feeling it, a finger all the time upon the spiritual pulse?³²

Still others complained of the inability of the modern nature writer to deliver the philosophical, moral, or scholarly "goods" of nature due to the commercialization of the modern popular press. Dallas Lore Sharpe, himself an author of some literary repute, attacked turn-of-the-century nature writers and the publishing business, much as

organized religion and clergy were attacked in the early eighteenth century. He suggested that the nature writer deserved his "dubious reputation" and flagrantly stated that they were "more or less" frauds. He commented on what he saw as corruption in religion and politics and suggested that the professionalization of the literary naturalist diluted the sincerity of the writer. He stated that "one may not invent emotions, nor observations either," and implied that the entire literary trade had become "insincere." Nature writing had become less a literary format for creative and accurate accounts of wildlife observation and "genuine emotion" than a money-making scheme totally subservient "to the bid of the publisher."³³

Sharp's scathing disapprobation speaks directly to a central point about the integrity of the nature writer and his or her business. The nature writing "business" was turning into an instrument of the publishers. The sensationalities that passed for nature essays were glossing over a sincere interest in investigating the out-of-doors. Nature essays were in no uncertain terms a melting pot for a variety of cultural concerns such as the uses of new technology, the struggle to cope with life in the city, and the uses of wealth. The sentiments expressed by those writers who were not necessarily "nature-lovers" per se, contributed most to the sensationalization of the Burroughs image.

Several articles written about Burroughs bordered on the ridiculous. These articles pushed the public image to extremes and presented Burroughs as very nearly a nature deity in corporeal form. Perhaps a better analogy, since we are speaking of popular perceptions, would be the presentation of Burroughs as an early Dr. Doolittle. For example, it was written of Burroughs: "The birds come out and sing their songs to him and he seems to understand not only their music but the very words. The squirrels, the chipmunks, the woodchucks and even the rabbits come, one by one, to sit on the old stone wall in front of the barn, and gaze at him"³⁴

One old issue revisited by the back-to-nature movement and manifest in the public image of John Burroughs was the issue of wealth. At the turn of the century there existed a shifting attitude toward wealth that saw, not the accumulation of wealth, but the uses of wealth as the criterion for moral judgement. The ethical use of wealth was beginning to find its way back into the moral fiber of the country. In 1906, The Outlook ran an anonymously authored article entitled "The Discarding of Wealth" in which it was stated that man's moral character was not judged by what he gets but from what he gives. If a fortune was accumulated at the price of the sacrifice of "integrity, fineness of soul" and freedom of the "development of his nature," then the monetary fortune rang hollow. Wealth, The Outlook suggested,

must be associated with "character, honor, genius," and "public respect," or it becomes "a very shabby substitute for the thing men once held it to be."³⁵ Gone from The Outlook's moralizing is the blatant distrust of wealth that had permeated American popular culture at the turn of the century. Replacing it is a more forgiving suggestion that the holder of wealth need assume moral responsibility. As we will see, this very sentiment found its way into association with John Burroughs.

During the last few years of his life, Burroughs enjoyed a close association with the giants of industrial America. Henry Ford (who initiated the friendship with Burroughs), Thomas Edison, and Harvey Firestone joined with Burroughs on what became annual camping expeditions. The camping trips of "the four vagabonds," as Burroughs affectionately called the group, were widely publicized by local newspapers, the popular press, and a battalion of camera crews from the Ford Company publicity department.³⁶ One account in the popular press of a camping trip to the Green and White Mountains of Vermont and New Hampshire in 1919 reflects precisely the shift in attitude toward wealth and its uses. Writing for American Magazine in February of 1919, Mary Mullett was quick to identify that at least three of the campers "were men of great wealth, familiar with luxury." She went on to describe an incident during the trip which, for our purposes, surrounded Ford with a most

favorable humanistic persona. Mullett reported that at one of their camp sights a timid little girl brought the explorers the gift of a pail of apples. The kind-hearted Henry Ford, "on the theory that one good turn deserves another," reached into his pocket and took out "one of his crisp new bills" and presented it to the gratuitous young lady who sped off eagerly to show her new found fortune to her father and mother.³⁷ Mullett's imagery is striking. She surrounds Ford with a favorite moralistic axiom, "one good turn deserves another," which tends to downplay his image of a masterly industrial capitalist. Another striking characteristic of Mullett's imagery is the money Ford gives to the little girl. It is "crisp, new" not dirty, implying and suggesting a degree of purity and wholesomeness to Ford's gesture.

Mullett continued her celebration of the impeccable character of the industrial giant by introducing modesty into Ford's moralistic repertoire, this time including Burroughs. The camping party stopped their cross-country trek one noon at a hotel for lunch. The woman who owned the establishment recognized Burroughs as the man "who wrote the nature books." The woman approached Burroughs and "lost interest" in the other visiting celebrities. Mullett reported that this pleased the modest Ford so much "that he actually rewarded her for her lack of interest in him by sending her a complete set of Burroughs's works."³⁸

Mullett articulates the changing attitude towards wealth by assigning to Ford a generous countenance and a modesty that reflects exactly what The Outlook article called for. But perhaps most pertinent is the fact that Ford is in the company of Burroughs, thus making the connection between the regenerative effects of nature and the campers themselves. Mullett concluded by reinforcing this idea: "as far as they could they lived simply, wholesomely, naturally. They dealt kindly and generously with one another and with the men and women they met."³⁹

As we have seen, the public image of Burroughs reflected a wide variety of changing social and cultural values taking place at the turn of the century. One might ask how accurately the popular press reflected the cultural changes and how close it came to accurately defining public attitudes toward nature? Were the cultural values that were read into the popular press's accounts of the wild merely a marketing strategy? Did the seeming dichotomies and contradictions in John Burroughs's public image represent the blindness of a consumer oriented society, or did Burroughs really touch an emotional chord in readers that facilitated a genuine case of personal introspection? There exist, I believe, two tests that can be run to authenticate the popular sentiment prominent in the back-to-nature movement and the public image of John Burroughs found in the popular press. One consists of investigating how nature was

being taught in schools at the turn of the century to see if a value system was indeed being attached to nature. Was there a shift in the attitude toward nature in the schools, and, if so, did it parallel the shift in attitude as reflected in the public press? The other test is the controversial Nature Faker incident.

The treatment of nature studies in the schools at the turn of the century reflects a shift in attitudes toward nature and a change in the methods of teaching about nature. The prevailing notion in the texts and materials published specifically as guidelines for teachers was the encouragement to develop in the child a moral appreciation of nature. In Nature Study and the Child (1902), Charles B. Scott suggested that a moral appreciation of nature was necessary in order to understand more clearly man's place in it. Describing his proposals in a chapter titled "Outline For the Study of the Rabbit," Scott suggested his general aim.

To awaken a sympathetic interest and love for all animal life, so that the children will be kind and gentle with their dealings with the animals...to broaden the sympathy and knowledge of the children by helping them to see some of the points of similarity between the homes and home life of the rabbits and of themselves...how the rabbits love and care for one another.⁴⁰

Although the moralistic overtones were more direct in the educational material than in the popular press's treatment of nature, the fundamental principles were identical: positive and virtuous human characteristics can be enhanced

by contact with nature. Another similar characteristic to be found in the classroom was the approach to the teaching of nature. Not only did the harried city laborer head outdoors, but the student did too. Scott suggested that his book be taken outside, and the student "there with dandelions all about him, investigate for himself. There he will not only best understand the facts, but will discover the spirit in which nature should be approached."⁴¹

The educational material pertaining to nature at the turn of the century reflected a straightforward application of morals to nature. They were not hidden among the public's attitude toward the automobile or the proper application of wealth as they were in the nature articles found in the popular press. Morals and nature in the schools went together. This lends support to the idea that the shifting sentiment found in the popular press was not merely a response to marketing strategy stimuli. The values read into the country's attitude and appreciation of nature were deep seated. They were important enough to be stressed to school children.

The Nature-Faker controversy of 1903-7 serves as a second and equally appropriate measuring stick by which to test the elasticity of the Burroughs public image. The controversy began with the publication of Burroughs's Atlantic Monthly article "Real and Sham Natural History" in March 1903. In the article Burroughs attacked nature

writers, specifically Ernest Thompson Seton and William J. Long, for crossing the line between fact and fiction and for making "a deliberate attempt...to induce the reader to cross, too, and to work such a spell upon him that he shall not know that he has crossed and is in the land of make-believe."⁴² Burroughs was referring specifically to reports in Seton's Wild Animals I Have Known in which the author wrote of foxes escaping pursuing dogs while riding on the backs of running sheep. Still another account of the fox's intellectual prowess saw it cunningly leading a pack of dogs onto railroad tracks where the unsuspecting canines would meet death under the wheels of a speeding train.⁴³ To this story Burroughs responded sardonically: "The presumption is that the fox had a watch and a timetable about his person."⁴⁴

For the next four years a number of essays by Burroughs and Long appeared in various periodicals in an attempt to get to the bottom of what was real and false in their respective nature publications. At the height of the controversy in 1907, the true-false issue in natural history was reduced to whether or not animals had reasoning characteristics which were identical to humans, and whether or not these characteristics were inherent in the animals, as contended by Burroughs, or if the reasoning characteristic in animals was taught by parent animals to their young, as held by William J. Long.⁴⁵

The major target of Burroughs's ire was William J. Long, a University of Heidelberg Ph.D and a minister at the First Congregationalist Church in Stamford Connecticut.⁴⁶ The New York Times saw an opportunity in the making and fueled the controversy by reporting on both sides of the argument, often baiting the public into wondering how one author would react in response to the other.

Dr. William J. Long gave a very good account of himself in the interview published in last Sunday's New York Times. There have been evidences during the week that his statement has won him friends. On the face of it, Dr. Long appeared not only to vindicate the accuracy of his account . . . but to establish the truth of a number of still more remarkable animal stories which he told for the first time. The question is, will the good impression created by Dr. Long survive the publication in the Times to-morrow of a reply by Mr. John Burroughs? To-morrow's issue of this paper will be exceptionally interesting in many features.⁴⁷

The reactions to Burroughs's involvement in the Nature-Faker controversy illustrated that the public was not blinded by the romanticized and, at times, sensationalized accounts of his life. The controversy caused many to question the character of Burroughs and even the accuracy of his own nature essays. Not surprisingly, the majority of criticisms of Burroughs came from New England, the home of both Seton and Long. One author, writing under the pseudonym "Connecticut," thought Burroughs's "Real and Sham" essay an over-inflated piece of self-indulgence. "Connecticut" suggested that Burroughs was "intolerant" toward other nature writers' honest observations and "good faith." Burroughs's article had suggested his own "dogmatic

ignorance" and displayed his "truculent temper and hopelessly bad logic." ⁴⁸ Still more criticism of Burroughs came in connection with his suggestion that he had never witnessed the wildlife behavior as it appeared in Seton's and Long's accounts. Some took this to mean, or imply, that if John Burroughs had not seen it himself, it was probably a falsehood, and they reminded Burroughs that wildlife did exist beyond the banks of the Hudson River. Writing for The Connecticut Magazine at the height of the controversy, F. T. Miller complimented Burroughs on his literary achievements but refused to dismiss the possibility that Long's account might have indeed occurred just as reported. Miller suggested that it was "passing the bounds of criticism," as well as of "reason," to suggest "that what one observer sees on his farm in New York must limit what another observer may see in the main wilderness" ⁴⁹ Burroughs's critics were not confined to New England. From his own state of New York came close scrutiny of his scientific accuracy. Reporting for The New York Times Saturday Review of Books, John R. Spears likewise recognized Burroughs's literary reputation and admitted a degree of shock that a naturalist of Burroughs's stature and authority could make a mistake in reporting his natural history. Spears used Burroughs's own Signs and Seasons against him by calling attention "to the fact that he asserts . . . that Bluejays do not eat meat." Fancy the expressions that would come over the faces of an

Adirondack guide on hearing Burroughs or any other man assert that Bluejays do not eat meat."⁵⁰

Whether or not the criticisms of Burroughs or, for that matter, the criticisms made by Burroughs himself during the Nature-Faker controversy were warranted, the important aspect pertaining to the public image of Burroughs is that ~~there was room in the public's opinion for finding him~~ fallible. The article quoted above suggests that while many Americans were enjoying Burroughs's works as a companion to their escapes outdoors, others were reading Burroughs critically, not only for his literary appeal but for his scientific contributions as well. For several reasons the Nature-Faker controversy could have damaged the reputation of Burroughs and altered the public image. But Burroughs's reputation continued as before, while William J. Long fell into relative obscurity. The controversy also served to solidify Burroughs's place in the hearts and minds of his admiring public. By 1907 the controversy had run its course. Burroughs became not only the spokesman for nature but the defender of nature from false natural history.

Regardless of the effects of the Nature Faker controversy on the Burroughs public image, Burroughs learned to temper his urge to seek out a battle in the popular press. His occasional public outspokenness (which toward the end of his life involved letters to the New York Times regarding Germany's atrocities in World War I) was a by-

product of his early defenses of his friend Walt Whitman. Burroughs spent a large portion of his writing career in defense of Whitman's literary works and personal character. In fact, Burroughs's first book, Notes on Walt Whitman as Poet and Person (1867), was written for precisely these purposes. To Myron Benton, Burroughs suggested that he had prepared himself for the impending critical onslaught. "I am by no means sanguine about the . . . success of the book. I am fortified against any indifference on the part of the public and literary men generally."⁵¹ Although his defense of Whitman was a personal issue owing to the compassion the two held for one another, Burroughs never really lost his spirit for a good battle in the popular press throughout his career. In the winter of 1870 he sent an essay titled "Bull in Our Bookshop Again" to the Galaxy.⁵² In a response to another author's criticism of his over-use of the word "virility" in one of his essays, Burroughs confessed in a letter to Joel Benton of his own tendency to draw first blood. "I can think of nothing in my last volume that should have offended her [Mary Clemmens]. Higginson, I see, sticks pins into me in the last North American, but I stuck pins into him first."⁵³

That John Burroughs enjoyed, and indeed sought out, a good battle in the popular press was revealed to Whitman in 1879. Burroughs discussed his latest essay, "Nature and the Poets," with him and how he carefully reviewed popular works

for accurate natural history. Burroughs told Whitman of completion of an article he had written on nature and the poets in which he detected inaccurate reporting on natural history. Burroughs suggested that he caught Emerson, Bryant, Whittier, and Longfellow "napping." Cautioning his friend to be accurate in his own accounts on nature, he suggested, "I shall have something to say about you . . . but I cannot

catch you in any mistake, as I wish I could, for that is my game."⁵⁴ By 1886, however, Burroughs was enjoying the attention he received as a writer and grew to have a better understanding of the publishing business and the value of keeping both his publishers and his readership happy. In 1886 Burroughs sent a copy of his (at the time) controversial essay "Science and Theology" to Benton with the hope that Benton's reading would detect any possible offenses. "Put your finger on the weak places; also tell me if you think it would produce a commotion among my readers in this country, if published here. Is it offensive?"⁵⁵

John Burroughs enjoyed a long and productive writing career. At the time of his death in 1921 at age eighty three, six days shy of his eighty-fourth birthday, he was working on yet another manuscript. Under the Maple Trees, his twenty-fourth and final collection of essays, was published posthumously. As a reflection of the culture in which he lived, his life represented a quiet acquiescence to the changes occurring around him. He grew to appreciate the

technological advances made during his lifetime, once even stating to a biographer that he doubted that he could live without his victrola. He even had a favorite song--Brahms'

"Lullaby."⁵⁶ Late in his life some of his personal correspondence was type written.⁵⁷

Burroughs's death in 1921 demonstrated public attitudes towards nature and where Burroughs fit into that perspective. Clearly, most of the novelty of the back-to-nature movement had given way to a kind of synthesis of what the movement meant to the culture at large. To its story on the death of Burroughs, the Louisville Courier added that mankind had learned from the movement and was approaching nature with a deeper appreciation of its teleological forces and its own technological potentialities. The Courier drew attention to the fact that man had spent a long time fighting nature but that through the battle had come a "deeper appreciation" of its forces. Man, the article continued, had just recently learned to "translate" the "potentialities of steam" into a "working force." Still, the compatibility of man and nature and, indeed, their peaceful cohabitation had begun. "The long process of making nature utilitarian has had one certain and inevitable effect. Man intent on master, has looked upon nature as an adversary, as a puzzle to be solved, as a sorcerer unwilling to divulge its secrets."⁵⁸

If, by 1921, America had extracted a metaphysical

lesson from the back-to-nature movement, it also found answers to some of the moral questions it was asking early in the movement. We recall that the early nature lovers went to the country looking for a rather vague morality. They knew that the outdoors was good, but just how to translate that goodness into practice was still somewhat sketchy. In Ansonia, Connecticut, the example of John Burroughs's simple life in the outdoors, and the virtues he found there, translated into care for others and could help to form a citizenry of sound moral fiber. To The Sentinel's death notice of Burroughs was added a degree of patriotic moralizing.

It is in such men as he that Americanism of the true sort finds its finest flower. He was of the material of which the republic builds its great and its best loved citizens. He belonged to the great line of Americans who lived their lives for the benefit of their fellows. Sane teacher, sound exemplar of the best that democracy affords, lover of nature . . . he stands with . . . the students of the wild.⁵⁹

The Boston, Massachusetts Traveler found the key to old age in the example of John Burroughs. He was not only a scholarly intellectual, but he had discovered the key to longevity. John Burroughs was "an example of what old age ought to be. This was because he had the good sense . . . to live near God's great out-of-doors, and to take plenty of vigorous exercise . . . chiefly by walking and by manual work."⁶⁰

Burroughs obituaries offer a fine segue into the later phase of the public image up to the present day. In his work

Back to Nature, Peter Schmitt suggested that by the 1920s the back-to-nature movement had begun to change its perception of city life. The moral and physical "catastrophes" that the popular press had warned of at the turn of the century failed to materialize. For the nature lover of the 1920s, the city was not so bad. Schmitt astutely pointed out that while nature was still being worshipped, getting back to nature had taken on the countenance of a social ritual, like going to church, and those who went back to nature did so "not because their salvation depended on it but because certain patterns of behavior naturally accompanied the role of the country squire or suburban commuter."⁶¹ David Shi pinpoints the shifting intellectual current which he called the "embourgeoisement" of the movement. By the 1920s the Boy Scouts of America offered merit badges in such "outdoor" activities as automobiling, salesmanship, and other questionable outdoor activities.⁶²

Reflecting these same sentiments, the Burroughs image likewise reverberated how the back-to-nature movement had lost some of its earlier intensity. The Washington, D.C. Star remembered Burroughs in a way that suggested a coming to terms with progress. For better or worse, the speed and noise of the twentieth century was an unavoidable part of the American experience.

In the death of John Burroughs America and the world lose much. We lose the last of a line of truly literary

naturalists who . . . sought ever to hold before an increasingly materialistic world the simple yet inspiring truths of nature The world moves swiftly these days and the highways of life are overcrowded . . . without laughter, without gentleness, without rest the concourse plods forward . . . toward some vague goal which the men and women of our generation seek at the highways end.⁶³

By the 1920s city dwellers had absorbed the back-to-nature movement as a part of their identity. The movement connected itself with social mobility, technological advancement, and capitalism. For some, getting back to nature simply meant owning a home in the country. Likewise, in reporting on Burroughs as the last of his breed, the Washington Star seemed to be letting go a giant cultural sigh in its acceptance of progress--progress for whatever progress might bring.

Unlike many popular public figures in American history whose image grows and expands in the years after death, Burroughs's image faded. Aside from a few celebratory articles published in 1921 and 1922 and Clara Barrus's lionizing John Burroughs Boy and Man (1921), The Life and Letters of John Burroughs (1925), The Heart of John Burroughs's Journals (1928), and Clifton Johnson's John Burroughs Talks (1922), Burroughs quite suddenly faded from the literary scene. Between 1922 and 1950 one finds scant reference to Burroughs that goes beyond covering his induction into some local bird club's hall of fame or a short biographical paragraph or two commemorating his birth or death.⁶⁴ In 1937 G. Clyde Fisher published "John

Burroughs and Conservation" for Birdlore, and in 1941 Alan Devoe wrote "John Burroughs: Inspired Farmer" for the American Mercury. Like the majority of their predecessors, these essays were brief biographical sketches that had little or nothing to do with their respective titles.⁶⁵

Part of the explanation for Burroughs's fading from the public eye might lie in the shifting forum of nature concerns. For much of the public, as Schmitt and Shi point out, nature had become acclimated into the lives of Americans and, as a result, it fell a couple of places on the scale of importance. Where nature did receive increased attention was in the political arena. During Burroughs's later years and the years following his death, the American government was in the process of formulating policies that would become American conservation law. But it was a developmental period with no established, long-range agenda, and the political interests that were brought forward were as diverse as the individuals who suggested them. Aldo Leopold brought to the political process a kind of romantic respect for nature that attempted to combine sentimental and spiritual concerns with scientific concerns. Likewise, men like Liberty Hyde Bailey were accusing mankind of moral wrong-doings as the natural world was being exploited for economic gain.⁶⁶ While the American government was attempting to construct standards for environmental concerns, the literary genre that Burroughs helped to

initiate was itself changing. In 1938, Russell Lord published Behold Our Land, which drew attention to the need for soil conservation. Stuart Chase's Rich Land, Poor Land (1936) warned of the dangers of what he called "the American concept of infinity," while William Vogt's Road to Survival (1948) called for a deeper understanding of man's relationship with nature and what it meant for the twentieth century.⁶⁷

What this meant for the public image of John Burroughs was that the portrait of a simple observer and spokesperson of nature was not adequate to satisfy the increasingly sophisticated, and indeed, more pressing nature concerns of the 1930s and 1940s. We recall that part of the construction of the image of Burroughs in the popular press was one of associating him with the changing social currents of the day. In the 1930s and 1940s Burroughs was not such an easy fit. Many of the things to which Burroughs helped America adjust and adapt, such as the automobile, were being called into question as being possibly damaging to nature. Burroughs represented a different attitude toward nature, one that celebrated nature and technology at the same picnic table.

The memory of John Burroughs resurfaced in the 1950s. Ironically, and in lieu of the changing perception of nature in the United States, most of the eight or so essays that appeared during the decade were nearly identical in

substance to those that appeared during Burroughs's lifetime. For the most part, the popular press renewed the same image of Burroughs that had sold so many nature volumes during his lifetime. What was absent from the 1950s version of the Burroughs public image, though, was its association with popular cultural currents that had made the earlier image so provocative and interesting. None of the articles that appeared during the 1950s can be looked upon as having any originality. They are banal, plain, and did little more than perpetuate the mythical aspects of the Burroughs public image. In 1953, Glenn Quilty recalled his first personal encounter with the venerated naturalist. On an unspecified day in an unspecified year, Quilty found himself driving with his parents in West Park, N.Y., when they stopped to observe a flock of butterflies.

We stopped to watch their flight, and only then became aware of a slim bearded man sitting on a fallen tree deep in the shadows. He was writing on a pad. The butterflies swarmed over him, alighting gently on his arms and shoulders. He smiled at us and waved, then continued to write.⁶⁸

Like the periodicals from the turn of the century, House Beautiful found a way to utilize Burroughs's public image for its own purposes. The periodical published Burroughs's 1886 essay "The Naturalization of the House" in 1953.⁶⁹

The plainness of the articles about Burroughs written in the 1950s is their most striking aspect. In the 1950s there was no change in the Burroughs image partly because the culture did not need Burroughs, or his image, to satisfy

a restless urge as it had at the turn of the century. America had the money, the time, and, if not the patience, certainly the nervous energy to entertain itself. Citing a U.S. News and World Report article of 1955, one historian described the 1950s culture of complacency.

The idea is getting around that there is no end to prosperity. Recessions, wars, other worries of the past seem far away. It's like a "new Era." Americans are living high, spending as never before, going into debt for new, fancier homes, cars and gadgets For now, all looks good.⁷⁰

The 1950s version of the Burroughs public image tells us more about the popular culture at large than about perceptions of Burroughs. The perception of Burroughs had not changed since his death in 1921. However, the stagnant nature of the Burroughs public image reveals a culture which was content with the status quo and a culture concerned with the self as an individual. It should come as no surprise that the majority of articles written about Burroughs in the 1950s were written on the basis of a given author's personal association with him.

The Burroughs public image experienced a readjustment in the 1960s. With the publication of Rachel Carson's Silent Spring (1962), America was awakened to a new sense of urgency concerning the environment. Carson drew attention to the dangers of DDT and other toxic chemicals and warned that we were poisoning the very air and water on which we depended for sustenance. Heeding Carson's red-flag warning, John Hay, writing for Audubon magazine, published a little-

cited but sobering call for America's need for a Burroughsian type vision. Hay realized the importance of contemporary environmental issues and brought the Burroughs image up to date by associating the naturalist with the potential volatility of 1960s. He recognized that this was not, in his words, the "relatively pastoral world that John Burroughs knew," and cited "modern anxieties and rifts" as the causes of man's contemporary alienation from nature. Man is "isolated as exploiter, divorced from obligation to what we imagine we have conquered."⁷¹ Hay was the first author in the popular press to really associate Burroughs with the contemporary environmental movement, although not the first to mention an association between Burroughs and environmentalism, that distinction having gone to Fisher in 1937. Hay was also the first to make a practical connection between the environmental implications of Burroughs's work and modern environmental concerns. "John Burroughs told his readers to have 'sharp eyes'. Cultivate sharp eyes and ears...and watch for the unexpected."⁷² But perhaps the most significant aspect of Hay's essay was his capturing of the essence of what Burroughs had been trying to say and making it pertinent to the 1960s.

We have a continual right to see the universe for its creative grandeur, manifested in us and in everything around us. Instead of spending all our time running around in a technological squirrel cage attending to our own needs, we might use technology to look beyond ourselves. . . . Nature gives us new dimensions, even of pity and terror, which are beyond our manipulation.⁷³

By the end of the 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s, Burroughs literature had begun to peel away much, if not all, of the sensational and the mythical aspects of the Burroughs image.

The 1960s also saw two additional scholarly studies of Burroughs with the publication of Gregory Lansing Paine's article "John Burroughs and the Cooperstown Seminary" and Millard C. Davis's "The Influence of Emerson, Thoreau, and Whitman on the Early American Naturalists--John Muir and John Burroughs."⁷⁴ The absence of the sensationalized articles on Burroughs and the, however slight, increase in scholarly studies offer an interesting insight into the uses of the Burroughs image. With the back-to-nature movement--if by the end of the 1960s that is what it still could be called--merely a showpiece for the socially mobile, the American public did not require or was not looking for an affirmation of nature's goodness. The turn-of-the-century nature lovers had been constantly trying to convince themselves that nature was good and their jaunts into the countryside would yield them access to the goodness nature had to offer. John Burroughs was a source of that affirmation. By the 1960s, however, Americans took the peace and quiet of nature for granted, and the source of their affirmation of nature was to own a home in the country.

In 1970, the public image of John Burroughs was identified with the issue of conservation, and it is as such

that Burroughs is identified in the 1990s. The contemporary, or modern, image of Burroughs is that of a visionary, an individual who by virtue of his contact with nature was able to see the importance of man's harnessing of his own ambitions. Into Burroughs's writings was read the language of twentieth-century environmentalism. In 1970, Perry Westbrook stated that "Burroughs's perception of the disastrous ravages being made upon the American environment qualifies him as an early and influential champion of reform. But he was only rarely an activist or open propagandist."⁷⁵ Westbrook reads an important nuance into the works of Burroughs, that of the need for man to begin to develop an environmental consciousness. He reveals how Burroughs is easily wedded to contemporary issues. Environmental reform and the championing of those issues was, if not unknown to Burroughs, at least not a focal point of his writings. Still, they are of primary concern to the late twentieth-century generation of Burroughs's reading public.

Illustrative of the significance of Burroughs's union to contemporary public concerns is the serious nature of the approach to Burroughs. In an article for The Conservationist, Paula Metzler revisited the famous Ford, Edison, Firestone, and Burroughs camping excursions. However, unlike her predecessors who attempted to champion the virtues of the participants, a more believable image of

the human side of the trips comes to the surface. In her description of the 1919 trip to the Adirondacks, Metzler describes the effects of the lengthy automobile drive on the eighty year old John Burroughs. "By the time the group neared the end of the trip Burroughs was 'glad to leave the caravan . . . [saying] I am tired and must get home.'" Metzler chooses to extract and present an aspect of the camping trip that, for whatever reason, went unnoticed in Mullett's article of 1919.

While it would be bad history to chastise Mullett's article for its lack of scholarly objectivity (she cited no sources) we can suggest here that at least by 1970 a concern with getting to the bottom of the real Burroughs had emerged. While Metzler's reporting of the worn out camper might appear a mere superficial anecdote to an historical event, its implications loom large in the public image of Burroughs. It suggests that the Burroughs image had finally passed into history. Metzler is not concerned with the implications that the reporting of Burroughs's condition would have on the public perception of him--as Mary Mullett, in 1903, apparently had been. Metzler reported that John Burroughs had had enough of the Great Outdoors and wanted to go home. She had brought little more cultural baggage to her writing of John Burroughs, Peter Novick notwithstanding, than a sense of historical objectivity.⁷⁶

In April 1995 there appeared in the Atlantic Monthly an

essay that offered valuable insight as to where contemporary American sentiment rests concerning its relationship with nature. Bill McKibben gave a vote of confidence to America's environmental movement by describing the re-forestation of a few of the major logging areas of the American Northeast. Simply put, the forest is returning. But the significance of McKibben's article reflects a return to the past regarding American sentiment toward nature.

The resurgence of the American forest in the East gives some distant promise that in other places in future days people may be able to depend on a replenished and revived nature to provide them with a modest and reliable life.⁷⁷

McKibben urges a more careful management of the logging industry and a less voracious economic attitude toward the depletion of forests. He also reflects many of the same sentiments that were called for in the back-to-nature movement of the turn of the century. Quoted above, McKibben suggests that nature can yet provide "the simple life," and can be relied upon to provide escape from the instability of the current economic order. Is it stretching the point to suggest that the sentiments that drove the back-to-nature movement are making their way back into the minds and hearts of contemporary nature lovers?

The sentiments that drove the back-to-nature movement have been altered to facilitate late twentieth-century perceptions of nature. We do not look at nature or technological advances with the same starry-eyed enthusiasm

as did the Americans who participated in the back-to-nature movement. However, to suggest that nature is less important to late twentieth-century Americans than their turn-of-the-century counterparts is not entirely accurate. Nature's public forum has changed as has the relationship between man and nature. The romantic expectations, the search for the sublime and, to a degree, the spirit of exploration that pulled turn-of-the-century Americans out of the parlor and into the woods has given way to a more excited sense of expectation in the form of environmental issues. At issue is not merely whether one will venture into the woods but whether or not the environment will survive.

Daniel Payne suggests that it is this very transformation that is responsible for the disappearance of Burroughs from the literary scene. His "unassertive prose style and his pastoral, nostalgic vision of America" do not pack the punch necessary for a more aggressive readership weaned on political jousting and the battle to save the snail darter.⁷⁸ However, Payne is a bit off the mark in referring to Burroughs's works as "dated." In a contemporary environmental sense perhaps Burroughs does appear dated. But to label Burroughs as such is to deny the very significance, and indeed impact, of the back-to-nature movement on American culture.

McKibben counters Payne's assessment of the contemporary Burroughs audience. He suggests, like Payne,

that it was the sentimental that attracted readers to Burroughs and the loss of it that was partly responsible for his disappearance. If Burroughs appears "dated" to contemporary readers, it is because they were reading him with late twentieth-century perceptions of nature. Reading and appreciating Burroughs requires a sense of historical context that McKibben nails down with unquestionable accuracy.

Burroughs has pretty well disappeared from the national memory, mostly because the landscape he lovingly described has ceased to be of much interest. . . . His message has been submerged as we have become urban and suburban people who escape to the national parks for relaxation, but perhaps it is beginning once more to be heard.⁷⁹

What has become dated is not the words of John Burroughs but the historical and cultural perception of nature that is brought to his works by his contemporary readership. Payne's mistaken assessment is, however, understandable.

Contemporary readers of Burroughs bring different cultural baggage to nature than did his turn-of-the-century readership. Today's reader brings with her or him the basic prerequisites of relief from work-a-day sensual clutter as did latter-day readers of Burroughs. Yet, contemporary readers bring a more thoroughly trivialized nature to Burroughs. While it is true that nature was in the process of becoming trivialized in Burroughs's day, being used to sell a commodity, it was still nature for nature's sake. If by "dated" we mean that Burroughs does not paint the same

portrait of the fox, the robin, the bluejay, or even the lowly skunk as he did eighty years ago, it is because today we need more from nature and from Burroughs.

The sentiments that drove the back-to-nature movement are resurfacing with many of the same fundamental premises which fed the enthusiasm of Americans getting back to nature still intact. The need for serenity away from the hustle and bustle of city and urban life remains, and Burroughs is still a vehicle by which Americans associate themselves with nature. While Payne hits the mark on identifying the inability of Burroughs's literary reputation to penetrate the more hard-core environmental consciousness of the late-twentieth century, the Burroughs legacy of appreciating nature for nature's sake still has a place in contemporary society.

Evidence of the cultural remnants left behind by the back-to-nature movement can be found in the guest register that is kept at Burroughs's woodland retreat Slabsides. Nearly seventy-five years after the death of America's nature guru, we still turn to Burroughs for escape from urban and city stress. Slabsides remains a shrine to the memory of Burroughs and a place where people go, revealing a cultural and historical association, or heritage if you will, with the back-to-nature movement. Between January 1994 and August 1995, over 200 entries were made in the Slabsides guest register. Along with recording names, hometowns, and

dates of visits to the Burroughs sanctuary, people feel compelled to leave personal messages in the register that reveal a striking resemblance to the literature of the back-to-nature movement. A visitor from Brooklyn, New York, stated that it is "always a delight to return & visit. The quiet and stillness are wonderful. Soaking it and this wonderful sanctuary up are such a relief and need for a Brooklyn/Manhattan resident." A visitor from the Great Lakes region in the State of New York revealed a sentiment that would have held equal resonance at the turn of the century by stating, "Once again I am here and haven't met anyone. Maybe that's the way it should be to feel the peace of the area while so near a noisy and cluttered world just a short drive from here. I am sure John would have been pleased."⁸⁰ Visitors from the San Francisco area stated that the "Burroughs sanctuary has brought much joy and relief from urban stress--and so it continues." Another visitor makes a connection between turn-of-the-century nature aficionados and the present day by stating, "we came here on a pilgrimage to literary naturalists retreats, from Davis, Calif. So pleased to find Slabsides so well cared for."⁸¹

To find the significance of this interpretation of the "career" of the public image of John Burroughs, it is helpful to return to the Native American concept of nature. For them, everything was alive. Not in the corporeal sense of a living, breathing organism, but in the spiritual, by

which everything from the turtle to the stone contributed to the understanding of their place among the "living" outdoors. In a sense, this is what the back-to-nature movement was all about--finding a place in nature. However, unlike the Native American, the turn-of-the-century American brought a great deal of "luggage" into the woods--mechanical, metaphysical, social, and spiritual. Indians could look into their hearts to interpret their relationship with nature, while turn-of-the-century Americans supplemented this internal investigation with a spokesman who interpreted nature for them. And it just might be this sense of confusion in the interpretation of humanity's place in nature that is responsible for overpowering the truly significant aspects of John Burroughs the intellectual.

In fairness to the culture in which he lived, Burroughs's reading public was bombarded with a great deal of marketing strategy and emotional stimulation. Put simply, much was new and exciting. The quest for peace and quiet was bound to reflect this. The possibilities for finding solace in the woods was drummed into every head that found itself reading the Atlantic, The Galaxy, Scribner's, or any one of the many journals that exploded on the literary scene at or about the turn of the century. This sensual stimulation was brought to an apogee by the automobile. Suddenly arcadia was within reach. As human beings, Burroughs's reading public would naturally adopt, accept, and buy into an ethos of any

kind that told them that what they were doing, what they aspired to, and indeed, what they were physically doing was good and virtuous. America wanted John Burroughs presented in the form that appeared in the popular press. The image of a Thoreauian type recluse with butterflies fluttering about him while cranking a Model T Ford and listening to his victrola is less a reflection of the popular press's rhapsodic goo as it is a reflection of a culture creating a new identity in the face of everyday life, and in the midst of technological and philosophical trauma.

After Burroughs's death much of the societal confusion had been cleared away. The problem was that his brilliance as an intellectual was buried in between chapters of more popular appeal. For example, his book The Last Harvest contains the essay "A Critical Glance into Darwin." The next chapter is a rather pleasant return to "The Robin." Therefore, I think it is safe to say that the selling of Burroughs appealed to a crowd that simply overlooked the more "scholarly" oriented topics. Those who might care to dig deeper into Burroughs's intellect did not realize that he was much more than simply a producer of nature essays. This idea is revealed by Burroughs himself on the occasion of his first meeting with his "spiritual father," the imposing Ralph Waldo Emerson. Introduced to Emerson in Baltimore in 1871 by Walt Whitman, Burroughs recorded Emerson's rather non-committal response when approached with

conversation regarding his reading of Burroughs's first nature book Wake Robin. Emerson "said he had 'Wake Robin' on his table, and had looked into it with a good deal of interest. Thought the title a capital one--expected to see an older man in me, etc."⁸²

Meanwhile, as the Burroughs image lay dormant and his volumes collected dust on library shelves during the period from the 1930s to the 1950s, the American perception of nature was entering another phase. The environmental movement attempted to adopt, or revise and reshape the Burroughs image. What is most interesting about this contemporary use of the image is the uncomfortable union of Burroughs to contemporary environmentalism. Authors tended to "force-feed" the image of Burroughs with late twentieth-century ideas and concerns. This tendency actually raises more questions about the present relationship of man to nature than answers regarding Burroughs's questionable environmentalism. What is behind the need to connect Burroughs to environmentalism? Is it to help revive a search for the pastoral, the sublime, or possibly the romantic aura of the back-to-nature movement with its exciting triumvirate of man, machine, and nature? Or is it because man's contemporary relationship with nature is still in a state of flux and we still need the assurance of champions from our past for assurance that we are on the right path? Or are we showing an ancestral connection with the turn of

the century that can use the public image of John Burroughs to say what we want to say?

We are nowhere near the core of John Burroughs's contribution to the American literary and intellectual scene. However, contemporary scholars have taken the necessary "first step" in clearing away the years of intellectual silt that have been accumulating since before the turn of the century. Burroughs was encapsulated in an image designed to appeal to the masses--an image constructed to sell magazines and to support the country's restless preoccupation with a cosmic ideal. Because he fit so well the part assigned to him during his life, he was lost to the decades immediately following his death. How ironic that it took another restless period in man's relationship to nature to revive him.

NOTES

1. Hans Huth, Nature and the American: Three Centuries of Changing Attitudes (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1957), 4.
2. The transition was neither rapid nor easy. Several works treat this changing perspective of nature in depth and in various contexts. Perhaps the most widely cited is Roderick Nash's classic Wilderness and the American Mind (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967), 1-83. Nash chronicles the changing concept of wilderness and articulates how the various attitudes regarding preservation and conservation of natural resources had evolved through the 1960s. Equally valuable is Timothy Silver's A New Face on the Countryside: Indians, Colonists, and Slaves in South Atlantic Forests, 1500-1800 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 1-66; and Calvin Martin's Keepers of the Game (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), 27-39. Silver and Martin articulate how the "new" perception of nature evolved into an entrepreneurial and, for Silver, ecological and conservational consciousness, and for Martin a lack thereof. See also William Cronon, Changes in the Land: Indians, Colonists and the Ecology of New England (New York: Hill and Wang, 1983), 34-129.
3. Huth, Nature and the American, 15-25. Huth must be approached with caution as his interpretation measures the value of Wilson, Audubon, Bartram, and Jefferson by their abilities to write flowery prose and glorify scenery. Likewise, some of Huth's factual information on Burroughs is inaccurate. Still, Huth accurately emphasizes the introduction of aesthetic appreciation to nature throughout his work and credits these four individuals with its popularization. See also Robert Henry Welker's Birds and Men: American Birds in Science, Art, Literature, and Conservation, 1800-1900 (Cambridge: The Belknap Press, 1955), 19-90. For secondary treatment of Jefferson's Notes, see Merrill D. Peterson, ed. The Portable Thomas Jefferson (New York: Penguin Books, 1975), 23-24; and, for Bartram's Travels, see N. Bryllion Fagin, William Bartram: Interpreter of the American Landscape (Baltimore, 1933).
4. Contemporary scholars draw caution to secondary interpretations of Emerson's Transcendentalism written during his lifetime and direct the student toward Emerson's own writings. Of pertinence to the student of nature philosophy are "Nature" (1836), "The Oversoul" (1841), "The

Transcendentalist" (1842), and "Thoreau" (1862). My secondary interpretation is based on Russell Goodman's American Philosophy and the Romantic Tradition (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 1-34; and David Shi, The Simple Life: Plain Living and High Thinking in American Culture (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 125-52.

5. Paul Brooks, Speaking For Nature: How Literary Naturalists from Henry Thoreau to Rachel Carson Have Shaped America (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1980), xii-xvi. Brooks's astute observation of the literary naturalist's relation to the public consciousness also suggests that the ascendancy of Theodore Roosevelt to the presidency brought 'stature' to nature writers. This interpretation can be misleading. Indeed, Roosevelt, and the ensuing conservation movement of the early twentieth century, increased the public exposure to writers like Burroughs, John Muir, and Ernest Thompson Seton, but the nature writer as a literary figure had enjoyed popularity for quite some time before Roosevelt's presidency. One needs only to point to the popularity of John James Audubon in the nineteenth century.
6. Peter J. Schmitt, Back To Nature: The Arcadian Myth in Urban History (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969), 3-19. Schmitt articulates that for most Americans the "fad" of getting back to nature took the form of bird watching, landscaping, and attending parlor lectures on nature subjects.
7. "Suburbanism for the Professions," The Independent 58 (1905): 1317-19.
8. "Out-of-Door life In America: In Closer Touch With Nature," Saturday Evening Post 171 (July 30, 1898).
9. "Back to Nature," The Outlook 74 (June 6, 1903): 305.
10. The standard account of America's intellectual reaction to the advances in technology remains Leo Marx's The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), 227-353. Also helpful in understanding how nineteenth-century America put the aesthetic appreciation of nature into practice is John F. Sears' Sacred Places: American Tourist Attractions in the Nineteenth Century (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 3-11. Sears also notes that the idea of American tourism was influenced heavily by the European experiences as recorded in the novels of Mark Twain, Nathaniel Hawthorne, and Henry James, which lends support to how seriously Americans were taking nature-related literature.
11. Frank Luther Mott, A History of the American Magazine, 3 vols. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1938), 3:5.

12. Ibid., 3:231.
13. John Burroughs to Myron Benton, Fall, 1879, in Barrus, Life and Letters 1:212.
14. Mr. Elliot Coues to John Burroughs, February 5, 1874, Ibid., 1:146.
15. Review of Wake Robin in The Atlantic Monthly 28 (August 1871): 254.
16. Review of Locusts and Wild Honey in The Atlantic Monthly 16 (July 1879): 123.
17. "John Burroughs as Prose Writer," The Dial 22 (January 1, 1902): 7.
18. "John Burroughs: Neighbor," The Outlook (April 28, 1915): 961.
19. Liberty Hyde Bailey, "What this Magazine Stands For," Country Life in America 1 (November 1901): 24-25.
20. Clifton Johnson. John Burroughs Talks: His Reminiscences and Comments (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1922), 130-31. Johnson's work illustrates plainly what cultural issues were at work in shaping the Burroughs image. His chapter titles include such diverse issues as "The Faults of a City," "Ideals in Education," "Farming Beside the Hudson," and "Making a Living." Nearly all so-called biographies of Burroughs published during his life time took an interview form, suggesting that Burroughs had substantial control over what was published about him. That his publishers were concerned over this is evidenced in the fact that one such biography, Clara Barrus's Our Friend John Burroughs (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1914), contained an autobiographical 'sketch' written by Burroughs himself that made up 102 of the book's 287 pages. For the serious student of Burroughs, among the most important biographical works is Edward Renahan's John Burroughs: An American Naturalist (Post Mills, Vt.: Chelsea Green Publishing Company, 1992). Painstakingly researched and extremely well written, Renahan's strength is his drawing attention to Burroughs's high profile associations with Theodore Roosevelt, Ford, Firestone, Edison, and nearly to a fault, Walt Whitman. Perry Westbrook's John Burroughs (New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1974) is more of a literary profile that stresses Burroughs's intellectual formation and influences that developed into his Transcendental approach to life. Nonetheless, Westbrook's valuable work can be considered the first critical work on Burroughs's life. Clara Barrus's The Life and Letters of John Burroughs contains valuable source materials. Appointed by Burroughs as his

'official' biographer, Barrus concerns herself mainly with celebrating and glorifying the life of Burroughs and allows selections of his journal entries and letters to provide a rather unstructured narrative. Still, the source material is carefully edited.

21. "John Burroughs, Naturalist," The Outlook 127 (April 13, 1921): 580-82.
22. Henry Litchfield West, "John Burroughs," The Bookman 64 (June, 1919): 392.
23. "The Car and the Country House," Harper's Weekly Advertiser (May 6, 1911): 30.
24. Ibid.
25. E.S. Martin, "Jostling the Simple Life," Harper's Monthly Magazine 114 (May 1907): 953.
26. Albert Houghton Pratt, "John Burroughs and his Haunts," The Outlook (January 27, 1915): 226. Pratt's celebration of Burroughs's driving prowess is misleading. Burroughs, by most documented accounts, was a terrible driver who escaped more than one potentially life threatening accident including once smashing through the back wall of his barn. However, Burroughs treated these mishaps with tongue in cheek fashion in his journals, which adds a comic overtone to his career as a motorist. For source material pertaining to the acquisition of his first automobile (there were three during his life) see Barrus, Life and Letters, 194-95. For treatment of Burroughs's automotive adventures and a sober interpretation of Ford's motivation behind the 'gifts' see Renahan, John Burroughs: An American Naturalist, 271-76.
27. An example of Houghton Mifflin's advertisements for Burroughs material can be found in Country Life in America 8 (June 1905): 225.
28. Country Life in America 7 (February 1905): 338.
29. Poughkeepsie Evening Enterprise (May 4, 1912).
30. Julian Burroughs, "How John Burroughs Makes Celery Growing Profitable," Country Life in America 9 (January 1906): 311. The title of Julian's essay is misleading but speaks to the marketability of Burroughs's image. Burroughs was himself not the prime beneficiary, nor the prime manager behind the celery growing enterprise. He rented the property behind his woodland retreat to a local man who actually farmed the crop and reaped a small profit. Other than making suggestions and enjoying an occasional swing of the hoe, Burroughs's

participation in the enterprise was nominal.

31. "Getting Back To Nature," The Saturday Evening Post 77 (January 22, 1898): 8.
32. "Nature," Scribner's Magazine 63 (June 1908): 762.
33. Dallas Lore Sharpe, "The Nature Writer," The Outlook (April 30, 1910): 994, 997. It should be pointed out that for Sharpe, John Burroughs was the quintessential nature writer.
34. Charles S. Olcott, "John Burroughs," Home Progress 2 (April 13, 1913): 25-28. Home Progress was a publication of the Houghton Mifflin Company.
35. "The Discrediting of Wealth," The Outlook (September 15, 1906): 108-9.
36. Renehan, John Burroughs: An American Naturalist, 271-76. The subsequent film was shown in theaters in the form of newsreels.
37. Mary Mullett, "Four Big Men Become Boys Again," American Magazine 137 (February 1919): 34.
38. Ibid., 91.
39. Ibid., 92.
40. Charles B. Scott, Nature Study and the Child (Boston: D.C. Heath & Company, 1902), 42, 49.
41. Ibid., 3. See also D. Lagne, Handbook of Nature Study: For Teachers and Pupils in Elementary Schools (New York: MacMillan, 1898), v.
42. John Burroughs, "Real and Sham Natural History," The Atlantic Monthly 91 (March 1903): 300.
43. Ernest Thompson Seton, "The Springfield Fox," Wild Animals I Have Known (New York: Scribner's, 1898; repr., New York: Penguin Books, 1987), 185-225.
44. Burroughs, "Real and Sham Natural History," 301.
45. The intricate dynamics of the Nature-Faker controversy are beyond the focus of this study. For careful evaluation and a sympathetic approach to both sides of the argument, see Ralph H. Lutts The Nature Fakers: Wildlife, Science and Sentiment (Golden Co.: Fulcrum Publishing, 1990). Lutts's study identifies the many-faceted implications of the controversy. Two of the most important were the connections made to the

increased awareness in man's relationship to the animals by the works of Charles Darwin and the demand for accuracy in future nature publications.

46. Lutts, The Nature Fakers, 55.
47. "The Nature Controversy," New York Times (June 8, 1907): 8.
48. Connecticut, "Mr. John Burroughs and Fake Natural History," Harper's Weekly 51 (March 23, 1907).
49. F.T. Miller, "Criticism of Connecticut Naturalists by John Burroughs in the Atlantic Monthly," The Connecticut Magazine (1903): 145-47.
50. John R. Spears, "Mr. Spears on John Burroughs's Criticism of Thompson Seton," The New York Times Saturday Review of Books (April 25, 1903): 288.
51. John Burroughs to Myron Benton, June 19, 1867, in Barrus, Life and Letters, 1:123.
52. John Burroughs to Myron Benton, (?) 1870, Ibid., 143.
53. John Burroughs to Joel Benton, August 1879, Ibid., 210.
54. John Burroughs to Walt Whitman, August, 1879; Ibid. Whitman loomed large in the life and writing of Burroughs. For a brief but believably fascinating interpretation of the relationship between the two, see Ann C. Rose, Victorian America and the Civil War (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 79, 93. Rose contends that Burroughs supplanted his strained relationship with his father with the 'father-like' figure of Walt Whitman. See also, John Burroughs, Notes on Walt Whitman as Poet and Person (New York: 1867), John Burroughs, Whitman: A Study (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1896), and Clara Barrus, Whitman and Burroughs, Comrades (Boston: 1931). Whitman himself corroborated on Burroughs's 'biography' of him and contributed "Supplementary Notes" to the second edition published in 1871. For a more objective interpretation of the Burroughs-Whitman relationship, see Renahan, John Burroughs an American Naturalist, 69-90.
55. John Burroughs to Myron Benton, September, 1886, in Barrus, Life and Letters 1:281.
56. Clifton Johnson, John Burroughs Talks, 281.
57. It is probable the majority of Burroughs's correspondence that was typewritten was typed by Clara Barrus. Along with being Burroughs's appointed literary executor, Barrus is credited

with providing a great deal of secretarial services to Burroughs that helped with the aging author's rather impressive productivity late in his life.

58. Undated newspaper clipping from the Louisville Courier. Vassar College Library Special Collections Department, Box 13, Folder 121A.
59. Death Notice, Ansonia Connecticut Sentinel (March 30, 1921), Vassar College Library Special Collections Department, Box 13, Folder 121A.
60. Death Notice, Boston Massachusetts Traveler (March 30, 1921), Vassar College Special Collections Department, Box 13, Folder 121A.
61. Peter Schmitt, Back to Nature, 186-87.
62. David Shi, The Simple Life, 213.
63. Death Notice, Washington, D.C. Star (March 30, 1921).
64. In 1924 Burroughs first received critical attention. Phillip M. Hicks's, "The Development of the Natural History Essay in American Literature," (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia), articulates that it was Burroughs's down-to-earth writing style combined with his hands-on learning from farm-boy to noted author that made Burroughs unique in his genre. An admirably detailed study of his Transcendentalist influences is marred by some nagging lapses of fact. Hicks was not careful with his dates. Likewise, one wonders which Burroughs Hicks was investigating when he stated flatly that the relationship between man and nature that Burroughs was interested in was not metaphysical. Still, Hicks's work is important as a literary critique. As a source for the public image, however, it is less valuable since it was never published in book form and saw only limited circulation among a few select scholars.
65. G. Clyde Fisher. "John Burroughs and Conservation," Birdlore 39 (1937): 115-17. Fisher credits Burroughs with doing more to arouse interest in conservation than any other author of his generation. One wonders if he ever heard of John Muir. See also, Alan Devoe "John Burroughs Inspired Farmer," The American Mercury 103 (July 1941): 111-14. Devoe is interesting not for any striking originality but for calling attention to the fact that John Burroughs had nearly been forgotten by 1941.
66. Nash, Wilderness and the American Mind, 194-99.

67. See Paul Brooks, Speaking For Nature, 218-70, especially chapter ten, which offers a splendid survey of the shifting nature of the literary naturalists toward conservation and ecology.
68. Glenn Quilty, "John Burroughs: A Boyhood Remembrance," Audubon Magazine 55 (September/October 1953): 208. Audubon Magazine published two other articles on Burroughs in the 1950s: Leonora Still Ashton, "John Burroughs: Neighbor," 53 (March/April 1951): 96-101, 136; and A. L. Byron-Curtiss, "My Last Visit With John Burroughs," 61 (September/October 1959). The essays are not in themselves terribly interesting nor informative but do suggest implication by association. All three authors wrote of favorable personal associations with Burroughs that are consistent with his tendency to avail himself to the public. What is interesting is why Audubon Magazine lent itself to such trivializing and celebratory literature. Having recently taken over Bird-Lore, Audubon Magazine was thrust into the highly competitive popular market. The essays of the 1950s reflect the highly competitive nature of the business and did not reflect the genuine interests of the National Audubon Society itself, nor the importance of its efforts in bird and wildlife preservation in the 1950s.
69. John Burroughs, "The Naturalization of the House," found in "In the Tradition of American Thought," House Beautiful 95 (1953): 239, 356-61.
70. "Is 'New Era' Really Here?" U. S. News and World Report (May 20, 1955): 21, reprinted in Shi, ed., The Simple Life 248.
71. John Hay, "Our Alliance With Nature," Audubon Magazine 66 (November/December 1964): 396.
72. Ibid., 395.
73. Ibid.
74. Gregory Lansing Paine, "John Burroughs and the Cooperstown Seminary," New York History 44 (January 1963): 60-77. Burroughs's stay at the Cooperstown Seminary was a brief four months in 1856. Paine made good use of the few primary sources that exist regarding this period of Burroughs's life and was forced to rely on Burroughs's recollections that appeared in Barrus's edited versions of the naturalist's journals and letters. What is admirable about Paine's essay is his hesitance to read too much into his limited sources. Millard C. Davis's "The Influence of Emerson, Thoreau, and Whitman on the Early American Naturalists: John Muir and John Burroughs" in Wilderness Society 30 (Winter 1967): 18-23, was another attempt to explain the Transcendentalists' influences on the

writings of Burroughs. While more of a literary criticism than history, Davis crams too much information into a few pages that flow poorly, with the result that the analytical synthesis suffers. Davis does make an important point regarding Burroughs's philosophy of nature that had previously escaped early commentators on his Transcendental tendencies. Burroughs was not a Transcendentalist in the strictest Emersonian sense but used the Transcendentalist approach to formulate his own writings and observations of nature.

75. Perry Westbrook, "John Burroughs: New York's Early Defender of the Environment," The Conservationist (August-September, 1970): 30.
76. Paula Wilens Metzler, "In Nature's Laboratory," The Conservationist (July-August 1977): 32.
77. Bill McKibben, "An Explosion of Green," The Atlantic Monthly 275 (April 1995): 83.
78. Daniel G. Payne, "In Sympathy with Nature: American Nature Writing and Environmental Politics, 1620-1920." (Ph.D. Dissertation, SUNY Buffalo, 1993), 126-27. Conspicuous only by his surprising obscurity, Payne has made the necessary connection between the early nature writers and contemporary environmental consciousness. By tracing the history of the nature essay with biographical and literary portraits, Payne articulates the evolution of environmental thought in much the same fashion as Martin and Silver replacing, however, colonists and Native Americans with the literary naturalists. Interestingly enough Payne correctly takes steps to remove Burroughs as a central figure in the school of environmental awareness that writers since the 1970s tended to force him into. By his own nature Burroughs was only peripherally concerned with environmental issues and wears the cloak of the environmental activist uncomfortably. Any work connecting Burroughs with an environmental consciousness as known to America since the 1960s should be treated cautiously and scanned for what has become an over-enthusiastic interpretation of Burroughs's approach to conservation and environmental politics.
79. McKibben, "An Explosion of Green," p.80.
80. From the Slabsides guest register. Entries made June 19, 1994, and July 6, 1994.
81. Ibid., July 25, 1994, and September 6, 1994.
82. John Burroughs to Myron Benton, January, 1871. Barrus, Life and Letters, 1:155.

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